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ABSTRACT

In comparing the teaching of English in the Soviet Union and in Puerto Rico, the author notes that English language instruction in the Soviet Union is characterized by well-trained teachers, good facilities, and an emphasis on practical phonetics, although writing skills are not up to contemporary standards. People are avid and enthusiastic students, but the program suffers from lack of contact with an English-speaking country. In Puerto Rico there is contact with an English-speaking country, but a lack of well-trained teachers and good facilities exists. There is also a difference in attitude toward learning English. The Soviet citizen studies English to enrich his life and is not afraid that he will lose his Russian culture. In Puerto Rico many students regard the study of English as a necessary evil that will soon be done away with, making it a waste of time. (VM)

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The Place of the English Language in the U.S.S.R.

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The Soviet Union is a land of contradictions. Its satellites and space ships can probe the depths of outer space and walk on the surface of the moon, but on Soviet earth a poor-quality ballpoint pen costs the equivalent of a day's pay. There are magnificent virgin forests, but Soviet authors are told their books cannot be published because there is a paper shortage. It is a country where women have been completely "liberated." Half the engineers, 80 percent of the doctors, and all of the street sweepers are women. But perhaps the strangest contradiction is this: that although the press, radio, television and movies constantly portray England and the United States as decadent, imperialist, war-mongering, inferior societies, the language of those countries—English—is given top priority over all other foreign languages by official government policy.[2]

In this article I would like to share with you some of my observations on the teaching of English in the Soviet Union. I shall try to answer three questions: WHO studies English, WHY they study English, and HOW they study English. Finally, I shall briefly compare the roles of English in the Soviet Union and in Puerto Rico, with regard to differing attitudes and the consequences of those attitudes.

In the Soviet Union as well as in Puerto Rico, you have to know English to get ahead in life whether you like it or not. And the Russians, apparently, like it very much. Far outstripping its next two traditional competitors, French and German, English is now the most widely studied

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[2] By "foreign language" I mean not native to the Soviet Union. Russia is the largest of the 16 republics. In the other republics, which have their own official native languages, Russian is a required second language. In a later paper I shall discuss problems of bilingual education in the Soviet national schools.

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foreign language in the biggest country behind the Iron Curtain.[3] It is taught from nursery school through university and on into adult education classes, both as a major and a minor subject. It is considered so important for higher education that passing a reading examination in English is one of the requirements for admission to universities and colleges, whatever the student's field of specialization. But even outside of academic life, there are numerous opportunities for learning, improving, and using English. Every bookstore has a section devoted to textbooks, dictionaries, and study aids. These are written and published in the Soviet Union, and are quite inexpensive by Western standards. English language clubs are very popular, especially with the younger set. In the larger cities, there are separate libraries of literature in foreign languages, primarily English, containing extensive, if carefully chosen, collections on many subjects. I have seen block-long lines of people waiting in the cold to get into these and regular public libraries on Sundays. As they stand in line, patiently waiting for a seat to be vacated in the reading rooms, they read their own books. The number of English titles meeting the observer's eye is striking. Who are these avid readers?

Outside of diplomatic personnel and their families attached to the British and American Embassies, who keep pretty much to themselves, there is no native English-speaking community in the Soviet Union. Only a tiny handful of Soviet citizens who spent their childhoods in other countries have learned English as a first language.[4] The Soviet government does not allow its citizens to travel freely abroad as tourists, except, in some cases, to other communist countries. The Soviet citizen cannot buy newspapers and periodicals published in capitalist countries on the newsstands,[5] nor is he allowed access to them in libraries without special permission, and in any case he would not want to cast suspicion upon himself by asking. Mail from abroad is carefully scrutinized, and anything potentially "dangerous" is confiscated, particularly news periodicals.[6] Since the ordinary citizen is so effectively insulated from contact with English-speaking countries, why is he so eager to learn English?

[3] There is also a small but growing interest in Spanish. What is said about the uses of English also applies to these other languages to a lesser degree. I was surprised at the lack of study of Chinese and African languages, which are well established in American universities. Undoubtedly these "exotic" languages are taught in military and diplomatic schools which I was unable to visit.

[4] Most of these were repatriated from China after the Second World War. Before the Communists took over China, there were several large foreign communities and good English schools. The Soviet Government declared amnesty to all White Russians who had fled the 1917 Revolution, and many of their children returned out of a feeling of loyalty and patriotism.

[5] With the exception of Communist Party organs, such as The Daily Worker.

[6] Khrushchev once made the statement that any Soviet citizen, if he wanted to, could subscribe to the New York Times. This is often repeated as a bitter joke.

The economic motivation is only a part of the story. It's true that a knowledge of English opens up better job opportunities, just as it does here, and I'll mention these later. However, the law of supply and demand doesn't operate the same way as it does in a free enterprise system. The Soviet Union is a vast monolithic country of over 200 million population, but there is only one employer—the Soviet government itself. The great majority of workaday jobs deal with running the internal affairs of the society, and can be handled without knowledge of any foreign language.

If you were to ask the Soviet citizen why he wants to know some English, you would get a variety of answers, most of which would fall under one heading: its prestige value. The evidence is plentiful. A taxi driver who suspects his passenger is a foreigner says "Thank you" instead of "*Spasibo*" when the fare is paid. In restaurants and night spots that feature live music for dancing, the vocalist always has a few songs in his repertoire with lyrics in English. This is done not only to please the foreign tourists in the audience, but to show his fellow Russians that he is "with it." Parents announce proudly to you that *their* children are reading Shakespeare and Mark Twain in school. When English language movies are shown at film festivals, tickets are sold out months in advance. A person who understands English is popular with his friends and neighbors, because he can report what he hears on Voice of America and BBC shortwave radio broadcasts, which are no longer jammed and which have special programs in Easy English. If he can speak English, he can converse with tourists he may meet in public places. Perhaps he will be lucky enough to receive a precious outdated copy of the *London Times,* the Paris edition of the *New York Herald-Tribune,* or another news periodical, which will be passed on from reader to reader for many weeks. He knows that his Soviet newspapers do not report events objectively, and he is hungry for news from abroad that is not interpreted to follow the party line. His knowledge of English is his strongest asset in his search for factual information, and at the same time the expression of one of his deepest desires—contact with the outside world. Every Soviet citizen with whom I spoke wants to travel to other countries, visit relatives, see the great capitals of the world with his own eyes, experience and enjoy the good things in other societies. He observes, with a mixture of pride and envy, that the foreigner can do this in his own country, and nurtures his private hope that his curiosity, too, will be satisfied. He knows he is dreaming a near-impossible dream, but, just in case the government relaxes its control over exit permits during his lifetime, he wants to be prepared. In a sense, then, learning English is a partial fulfillment of this hope.

So much for the interests of the man in the street. What about the interests of Soviet policy-makers in promoting the study of English? The

demand for specialists, both internally and externally, is considerable. Let's consider the external needs of the Soviet Union first. Although the percentage of Soviet citizens living and working abroad is small, it still runs into the thousands. In almost every country of the world, there are Soviet diplomatic personnel, journalists, and trade mission representatives. The USSR contributes staff to the various permanent UN organizations, such as UNESCO in Paris, the World Health Organization in Geneva, the Atomic Energy Commission in Vienna, and of course the activities at the New York headquarters. More and more officials and scientists are being sent to international scientific and cultural congresses. Even in countries where English is not the official language, it is likely to be used as the *lingua franca,* especially in smaller countries, such as Denmark, Thailand, etc., where it is well established by tradition as the second language. The Soviets never like to appear second best in any international situation, and they therefore make sure that their representatives abroad are well grounded in English, or supplied with their own translators and interpreters who are.

The Soviet Union also needs English language specialists for its commercial operations. Its planes and passenger cruise ships go to all parts of the world, and bring paying visitors from all parts of the world. To compete for the hard currency tourist dollar, they maintain English-speaking staffs in their Intourist travel agencies around the world, not only in English-speaking countries. Since tourist itineraries have to be arranged and paid for in advance, it is essential that their staffs be linguistically competent.[7]

Scholarly exchanges, such as the one in which I participated, are also on the increase. Dozens of bright young Soviet scholars have studied in America since the first Cultural Exchange Treaty was negotiated in 1958. For several years this has included summer teacher exchanges.

The Soviet Union, like the United States, gives foreign aid to many underdeveloped nations, and even has a type of Peace Corps program on the person-to-person level. For service in many of these countries, a knowledge of English is extremely useful, even if not mandatory, whereas Russian is not well established as a second language anywhere outside the Communist bloc.

All the uses of English mentioned above—the diplomatic, commercial, academic, and so on, are only a part—the less alarming part—of the reasons for training foreign language specialists.

Communist ideology is still committed, as it has always been, to eventual world revolution. According to Marxist doctrine, the capitalist-imperialist countries will meet their respective downfalls through dis-

[7] Since the average Soviet citizen cannot travel abroad, he knows very little about his government's activities in international tourism, and is usually astounded at the prices tourists have to pay.

integration from within. However, the Communist Party in the U.S.S.R., just as in other countries where it is a political entity, is not averse to helping the process along by the skillful use of propaganda.[8] Lenin himself realized that language is the most powerful tool of all in the struggle for control of men's minds, and he laid down detailed directives for its revolutionary use, not only within Russia but also for export to other countries. In general terms, aside from the promulgation of actual Marxist-Leninist teachings, Soviet export propaganda has two main objectives: to identify the political friends and enemies of the Soviet Union, and to create a favorable image of its people, its way of life, its accomplishments, and its position of leadership in scientific and cultural affairs.

The official organs for implementing Lenin's directives are Radio Moscow, the Foreign Languages Publishing House, and the TASS News Agency, which collectively employ thousands of foreign language specialists.

Radio Moscow beams shortwave broadcasts to all parts of the world. English language programs predominate because of the wide audience they command. There is a full daily schedule of news, features, interviews, and concerts of fine music. Interspersed with the inevitable periodic analyses of news events, there are many interesting, informative, and enjoyable programs. The English of the announcers is near-perfect, attesting to the excellence of their language training.

The Foreign Languages Publishing House produces books, journals, and newspapers primarily for dissemination abroad, but also available to interested readers inside the country. Among its regular periodicals are the following English titles: *The Moscow News* (a weekly), *Soviet Russia*, *Soviet Woman*, *Soviet Film*, *Sports in the USSR*, *New Times*, *Culture and Life*, *International Affairs*, *Foreign Trade*, *Soviet Literature*, *Soviet Military Review*, *Soviet Inventions* and *Soviet Industrial Designs*. Many large university and city libraries in the U.S. subscribe to these periodicals, and I have seen them for sale at newsstands in New York and other cities in the States.

The TASS News Agency provides English language services for foreign correspondents based in Russia and also sends press releases to its branches in other countries. It maintains a censorship office through which foreign newsmen must channel their stories, and guards against undue or unfavorable distortion of items translated from the Russian news media.

Turning now to the Soviet Union's internal need for English specialists, we find that in actual numbers it is even greater than the external needs. Here, too, a great deal of news gathering and interpretation

[8] I am using the word in its Russian sense, which is not at all derogatory. The official Russian-English dictionary of 1963 defines the word as "the dissemination and profound elucidation of some kind of ideas, doctrine, or body of knowledge."

goes on, but in the reverse direction. The degree to which the Soviet press is controlled is difficult for outsiders to comprehend. There are no privately run newspapers, nor any periodicals at all which are not obviously sympathetic to the Communist cause. Expressed differences of opinion on political matters are considered dangerous because they weaken the unity of the country.[9] The government itself, therefore, is charged with the responsibility of keeping up with events abroad and supplying this information to the Soviet people in acceptable form, which means in accordance with established government policies. The language specialist, therefore, is the right arm of the government—the go-between who has access to the outside world, but can be trusted to transmit the "correct" version of what happens there to the Soviet public.

Another important go-between is the literary translator and critic. Russians are avid readers, not only of their own literary masterpieces, but of foreign literature in translation. Among the most popular American authors are Jack London, Hemingway, Faulkner, and the modern Negro poets. It takes great skill to translate literary works, because the translator must have an intimate knowledge of both cultures. I was amazed at the knowledge of American life and history displayed by professional translators I spoke with in the Soviet Union, none of whom had ever visited the United States.

Also indispensable to the writing profession is the literary critic. It is his job to describe, analyze and comment upon books, movies, art, and music produced in the outside world. In several journals devoted to these topics, the ideas and ideals of other cultures are interpreted for the Soviet reader. The only underground movement of any importance in the Soviet Union is found among literary figures, and it is significant that two of the most famous defectors of recent years—A. Anatoli, formerly Kuznetsov, and Stalin's daughter, Svetlana Alilueva, chose English-speaking countries for their new homes.

From a practical dollars-and-cents point of view, the greatest need for English language specialists in the Soviet Union is in the rapidly growing tourist industry. Every year thousands of tourists come from English-speaking countries to satisfy their curiosity about the world's biggest country, and hardly any know Russian. Intourist, the official tourist organization, not only handles the arrangements for their visits before they enter the country, but must provide various kinds of facilities and services for them during their stay. This includes special tourist hotels, restaurants, bars, transportation, tickets to theaters, postal, telegraph and telephone services, sightseeing tours and guides. To encourage the spending of hard-currency dollars, Intourist even provides a chain of stores where

[9] On one of my previous visits to the Soviet Union, as a tourist, I engaged my Intourist guide in a philosophical discussion. She defined "friend" as "a person who agrees with me."

the tourist can buy Russian furs, watches, liquor, cameras, radios, and other souvenirs without having to change his money into rubles. Needless to say, jobs with Intourist are much sought after by young people, as they give them an opportunity to practice and improve their English and to learn about the world outside.

In addition to the paying tourist, there are a great many other kinds of visitors for whom the Soviet Union must provide interpreters and translators. This is necessary even when, as is usually the case with diplomatic delegations, they bring their own, as the accompanying interpreters are not always familiar with local customs. Russia has hosted a number of international scientific and cultural congresses where papers are read in English and other foreign languages. These are then translated into Russian for publication of the proceedings. Another aspect of the use of interpreters inside the country, which is little publicized for obvious reasons, is to facilitate the setting up of factories and the installation of sophisticated equipment manufactured in capitalist countries. I was quite surprised at the number of British engineers and technicians I met in the Soviet Union. One group was going to Armenia to start a synthetic-wool factory; another was in charge of modernizing a printing plant and training Russian workers to use computerized printing machines. In order to get the jobs done, the Soviet Union must of course provide interpreters and translators to communicate instructions.

The professions in which a good knowledge of English is most important are in the academic and scientific field. I have already mentioned that a reading knowledge of English is mandatory for getting into a university. But it does not stop there. In order to do any kind of advanced research, the scholar must keep up with developments in the advanced countries of the world outside the Soviet Union. I worked for several weeks in the Academy of Sciences Library in Leningrad compiling a bibliography of Soviet publications in linguistics, and I had the opportunity to have a look at their holdings in English. The collection of American and British scientific and technical books and journals was extremely comprehensive, though not up-to-date. The foreign language reading room was always full of readers laboriously copying out whole sections of publications such as *American Chemical Abstracts*, because photocopying services are inadequate and very expensive, and nothing is allowed to be taken out of the library. This is the kind of dedication to knowledge that led to accomplishments like the first Sputnik!

The problem of keeping up with scientific literature is one of the main motivations for research on computerized automatic translation, and both the Soviet Union and the United States are working actively in this field, but neither country has as yet solved the problem.[10] Since all Soviet

[10] Many of the U.S. projects have been abandoned because it is much cheaper to hire a human translator.

scientists can read English, but comparatively few American scientists can read Russian, they have the advantage over us in this respect.

Not only must the scholar be able to read English fluently, he must be able to write English as well, if he wants to be one of the elite in his profession. "Publish or perish" is the rule in Soviet academic life just as in other countries. The Soviet scholar's reputation, however, depends not only on how much he has published, but how much he has published *in English*. Furthermore, since he can't buy books directly from foreign bookstores because of currency restrictions, he maintains a regular correspondence and book exchange with Western colleagues to keep his personal library current. Aside from all these incentives to know English well, the Soviet scholar, no less than the ordinary man on the street, wants to go abroad to accept teaching and lecturing invitations, and for him, too, a fluent knowledge of spoken English is the best preparation for that long-hoped-for day when his exit permit will finally be approved.

We come now to the greatest need of all for English language specialists—the teaching profession. Some English is offered on a voluntary basis in virtually every school in the Soviet Union. Specialization can start at a very early age. There are kindergartens where English is emphasized. The government provides specialized boarding schools on the elementary and high school level where some or all of the courses are taught in English. And in all institutions of higher learning, the English department is always the largest foreign language department. When one considers that, almost without exception, every Soviet teacher of English has to learn the language as a second language, and at the same time meet rigid educational standards to qualify for teacher certification, it becomes apparent that an enormous amount of effort goes into the training of language teachers. The students are highly motivated to work hard because higher education is competitive. All students are subsidized by the government, and if they do not progress they are disqualified from further study, after which they can get only menial jobs.

The pedagogical institutes I visited in Leningrad and Moscow were impressive, and I could not help wishing we could offer our students such fine facilities. The Herzen Pedagogical Institute in Leningrad, which trains teachers for public and vocational schools, has classrooms designed specifically for language study, soundproofed and equipped with audio-visual aids. There were several language laboratories with individual booths, a separate linguistics and literature library, and a modern recording studio staffed by technicians for preparing materials. Each major language has its own lounge, attractively decorated with photographs of scenes in the countries where the language is spoken—in the English room, there were pictures of Piccadilly Circus in London and the Empire State Building. Students and faculty congregate in these lounges for

social hours or special programs given in the language being studied. No Russian is allowed to be spoken in the foreign language lounges.

The Moscow Pedagogical Institute of Foreign Languages has two laboratories, one for teaching and another for speech research. Attached to the teaching laboratory is a large tape library, where the student can check out for individual listening not only exercise and drill materials, but stories, speeches, and readings on a multitude of subjects. I was told that even some of President Kennedy's speeches were in this library!

The speech research laboratory is the finest of its kind in the country, containing the most advanced instruments for phonetic and acoustic analysis of speech sounds. Since this is my own area of specialization, the students were eager to discuss their projects with me. A majority of the research projects being conducted at the laboratory involved English. One of the more interesting was a comparison of British and American dialects. The student had spent several months in Canada as guide at the Soviet Pavillion during the World's Fair, and her English sounded completely American. This, as I'll explain later, is the exception rather than the rule.

In the pedagogical institutes and universities, English teaching majors follow a rigorous program. They are required to take educational psychology, literature, language teaching methodology, general linguistics, structure courses in Russian and English, and Marxist-Leninist philosophy. A great deal of emphasis is placed upon articulatory, acoustic, and practical phonetics. Students perfect their pronunciation in individual drill sessions, in which the student must criticize his own speech and point out his mistakes. I sat in on one such session. The student had previously tape-recorded a short passage in English. The teacher replayed it, sentence by sentence, stopping after each one. The English was not perfect, but quite intelligible, and in my own classes I would have let it pass as acceptable. This student, however, had been trained to be highly self-critical. She pointed out every phonetic deviation from the norm in articulation of sounds, phrasing, intonation, and rhythm, explaining why it was wrong in terms of interference from Russian or inadequate command of the phonological rules of English. She then had to repeat the entire passage making all the changes she had indicated. If she missed one, the teacher stopped her and she began again from the beginning. By the end of the session the student was perspiring from strain. The teacher later explained to me that this ordeal is necessary training for the future language teacher, because the teacher who speaks a foreign language improperly is a poor model and the students will copy his mistakes!

This insistence on "correctness" of pronunciation according to an established norm is rigidly adhered to. Only one kind of English accent is taught in language classes, and all teaching materials are based upon it. This is RP, which stands for "Received Pronunciation," and which is more

familiar to us under the label "Oxford English." Actually, this accent is not even taught in England. It is picked up naturally by children of well-to-do parents who can afford to send their children to private schools. (This is another anachronism, because in England the tuition schools are called "public schools".) Although it is the accent used by BBC announcers and most well-educated people, the majority of people in England do not use it, and in some English-speaking countries, such as Scotland, it is not even the prestige accent. A few British educators have even advocated doing away with RP in teaching English as a second language because it is more difficult for speakers of other languages to learn to pronounce correctly than other accents, and also because it sounds, to many people (including Americans), affected, supercilious, and unfriendly.

There are several reasons for the Soviet's insistence on RP as the English pronunciation standard in language classes. First, it is believed by educators to be the most universally intelligible and socially desirable pronunciation of English. Secondly, textbooks and pronunciation manuals have been traditionally based on the works of British phoneticians, who made detailed linguistic descriptions of that variety of English. Thirdly, because almost all English language teachers in the Soviet Union are non-native speakers who have been trained in RP by other non-native speakers, it would be highly impractical, in the absence of a large number of native speakers, to introduce other English accents. This does not mean that other accents are not learned. Russians do hear and imitate the English of tourists, foreign students, films, and Voice of America broadcasts, but in the university classroom they are allowed to speak only RP.

This exclusion of other commonly spoken forms of English often leads to unfortunate contradictions, because RP is definitely not suitable for many kinds of texts. I remember one class in which sections of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* were being read aloud. All the familiar folksy characters—Tom Sawyer, Injun Joe, Becky Thatcher, Aunt Polly, and the uneducated Negro slave Jim—conversed with each other in perfect Oxford English. The effect, to say the least, was ludicrous.

A less amusing story was related to me by an American college graduate from the state of Nebraska. During my stay in Leningrad, a group of American undergraduates was studying Russian for a semester at the university under an experimental program. The group leader brought his family with him, and the children attended Soviet schools. Since they were staying in a hotel and eating in student dining halls, the wife had time to spare. As a gesture of good will (she thought), she went to the Chairman of the English Department and offered her services as a native speaker for conducting conversation classes free of charge. As I indicated, she came from Nebraska, and spoke good General American, with some

typical regional characteristics. She would never be mistaken for a Bostonian, but Harvard University would not deny her admission on that account. She was told by the Soviet department head, however, that her speech was completely unacceptable, and that even if a lot of Americans spoke that way, their students must not be exposed to it!

The textbooks used in English grammar and composition classes are generally well organized and give a thorough treatment of traditional concepts. However, the vocabulary and phraseology in the example sentences and in the exercises is very often stilted, old-fashioned, and clumsy. It is quite obvious that Soviet language textbooks are not written or edited by native speakers of English, and equally obvious that the authors have never lived in English-speaking countries. Conversational expressions for practice dialogues are often taken from quotations in 19th century British literature, giving them an unreal and unnatural quality. Cultural differences in the concepts of such things as humor are also apparent.

I have in front of me a booklet entitled *Brush Up Your Grammar,* published in 1965, which, it is stated in the Foreword, can be used as supplementary material in a remedial grammar course. It consists of "amusing" anecdotes arranged to illustrate various grammatical constructions. Part 1 is headed "Active Voice. Present Indefinite. Expressing Repeated Actions in the Present," and the first anecdote is the following:

A Philanthropist

NEIGHBOUR: What's your father, Bobby? What's his profession?
BOBBY: He is a philanthropist.
NEIGHBOUR: I am sorry! Say it again, please.
BOBBY: He is a philanthropist.
NEIGHBOUR: A what? What does he do for a living?
BOBBY: I say he is a philanthropist.
NEIGHBOUR: A phi-lan-thro-pist? And what does he actually do?
BOBBY: Why, a lot of things. First he collects large sums of money for the poor natives in the colonies and then he builds houses in our town.

Another typical anecdote, which illustrates "Active Voice. Present Perfect and Past Indefinite," is the following:

No Real Harm Done

HELEN: Have you heard, John, that Mary and Jane have quarrelled for good and all?
JOHN: Oh really, have they? And did any of them call the other ugly when quarrelling?
HELEN: I hope they did not!
JOHN: Oh, then they will soon make it up.

Reading passages are selected with great care to condition the proper attitudes as well as provide teaching material. News items and feature articles are reprinted directly from *The Daily Worker* and depict a one-

sided picture of life in capitalist countries—the bad side. One of the textbooks in my collection includes readings on the following topics: "Conductor Hits Woman Passenger" (report of an incident on a London Transport bus involving a colored woman); "Mine Inspectors Hold Company Guilty in Death of Six Workers" (about an accident in the Bethlehem Mines caused by explosion of accumulated gas); "Lungs Cheaper for Ford than a Ventilator" (on poor working conditions and a sarcastic barb thrown at Ford's "humanitarianism").[11]

Also emphasized in textbook reading passages taken from English sources are items about the accomplishments of the Soviet Union in space, in cultural life, and in international peace and cooperation. These exercises are especially useful to the student, as they help prepare him for future jobs in the various information-dissemination organizations.

The quality of the English written directly for publication is not uniform, and the standards for acceptability generally fall far below those for the spoken language. One often comes across passages that have been literally translated from Russian without any feeling for English idiomatic usage, producing a kind of thinly disguised "Russglish" which is not very intelligible. The following example is taken from the English summary of a textbook written in Russian on the psychology of teaching foreign languages:[12]

> To teach a foreign language and closely connected with it thinking is an up-to-date task. It is well theoretically grounded and quite modern. We find this reasonable approach to language teaching in works of methodists and psychologists of the past too. However, the aim gets the wrong wording today in the works of those who say that thinking in a foreign language should be the focus of the teaching process.

To sum up, Soviet methods of teaching English have produced mixed results. Well-trained teachers, good facilities, and strong emphasis on practical phonetics are responsible for the high degree of proficiency in oral skills. These favorable conditions, however, are insufficient to bring written skills up to contemporary standards. English teaching in the Soviet Union suffers from the same malaise as society in general—lack of contact with English-speaking countries. It is a tribute to Soviet educators that they have accomplished so much in the absence of such contact.

In Puerto Rico, we have the contact with an English-speaking country, but a dearth of well-trained teachers and good facilities, so perhaps it is not surprising that our results, in comparison to the Soviet Union, are poor. However, I think that there is a far more basic difference that may help to account for our failure, and that is *attitude* toward the language. The Soviet citizen studies English to enrich his life, broaden his horizons, and identify with fellow human beings across international borders. He is

[11] A. V. Petrova, *Samouchitel' anglijskogo jazyka*, Moscow, 1960.
[12] V. A. Artemov, *Psixologija obuchenija inostrannym jazykam*, Moscow, 1969.

not afraid he will lose his Russian culture or that his native Russian language will degenerate because he acquires a new communication code. Learning English is not a threat to his political and social institutions, on the contrary it makes him a more useful citizen. In fact, since he is encouraged by the government to learn English, it is a patriotic thing to do!

Contrast this with the attitudes toward English prevalent in Puerto Rico. I have the impression that, to many young people searching for personal national identity, English is a necessary evil that will soon be done away with altogether, so that learning it now is a waste of effort. I have even heard English accused of ruining the Spanish language and impoverishing Puerto Rican culture!

This is not the first time in history that nationalism has prevented rationalism. After the Soviet army invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968, many Czechs refused to speak Russian. There were language riots in Belgium a few years ago. Canada is embroiled in bilingual troubles, brought on in part by the separatists. In India, they tried to do away with the use of English for political reasons, then found that it was the only language that was understood in all parts of the country. Language divides as well as unites.

I do not wish to discuss here the pros and cons of the English language controversy in Puerto Rico. The views on both sides were thoroughly aired in 1969 in a series of articles appearing in the *San Juan Star*.[13] I would like, however, to point out some well-established linguistic facts and clarify some mistaken notions about the nature of language from a scientific point of view:

1. English is the world's Number One international language. The number of people who use English as a second or third language far outnumbers its native speakers.
2. A language is a means of communication. It may be part of a culture, but it is not culture itself.
3. No official or unofficial attempt at language "purification" has ever been successful.
4. The only language which does not change is a dead language, a frozen relic of a society which has ceased to exist. And Puerto Rico is very much alive.

[13] I am referring to the series of letter exchanges initiated by Professor Ralph Long of UPR. Such free and open discussion of public issues would be unthinkable in the Soviet Union, where all policy decisions are made behind closed doors, announced, and accepted without question or challenge.

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